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ABSTRACT

This booklet for parents explains the activities that take place in kindergarten and the characteristics of kindergarten staff. Also discussed is the manner in which the activities and staff help children develop. Activities considered center around dramatic play; children helping themselves and others; pets; cooking; snacks; exercise; reading and writing; mathematics; group activities; work, play, or activity time; and parent involvement. The booklet concludes with discussion of children with special needs in kindergarten and the nature of children's learning and motivation. (BC)

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FOR PARENTS:

An Introduction to Kindergarten

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New Nouveau Brunswick

Student Services Branch
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Fredericton
1992

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Dear Reader

If you are the parent or guardian of someone who will soon be starting kindergarten, this booklet is for you.

It's a big step. Like the first word, the first step and the first loose tooth, starting kindergarten is a milestone. Your child may be eager and excited, perhaps a bit nervous too. What about you, how do you feel? Most of us feel ambivalent about each of the steps our children make toward growing up. Your ambivalence is probably healthy. It means that you can understand your child's uneven growth, so that you can applaud his efforts toward independence and responsibility while still providing the support and protection he needs from you.

What are your expectations of kindergarten? Perhaps your neighbour has told you that sending your child to kindergarten is a must for getting her ready for grade one. But Grandfather may think it's nonsense. "Why can't you just let her be a kid?" he wants to know.

The pictures here were taken in New Brunswick kindergartens. We hope they will give you an idea of what goes on in kindergarten and who will be there. The text will explain how these activities and people help your child develop. After all, that is the idea behind kindergarten; the "children's garden" exists to support and enrich the children's natural development. Like a real garden, it should be a place of energy, interest, happiness and beauty.

Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is a beloved and important kindergarten activity. Young children do not keep their imagining inside as adults do when they daydream. Nor, when they don costumes and assume roles, are children putting on a performance. Kindergarteners learn by becoming. They play out what it is like to be a storekeeper or an astronaut or a secretary. This imaginative play helps them make sense of the busy adult world around them.

What is the teacher's role here? She supports the children by providing props, making suggestions, and by helping the child who is standing on the sidelines find a way to join the action. By watching and sometimes joining in their play, she can see how to use it to each child's advantage. She may decide, for example, that the children need more information about stores.

Perhaps she'll take them on a trip to the neighbourhood grocery store so that they can find out more details about how the storekeeper attracts customers, keeps track of stock, takes money and handles telephone orders - kindergarten research. Helping this child make a sign and that one construct a costume, while pointing out to the typist the first letter of her name, the teacher enriches and extends the scope of their play.

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Helping

Helping themselves and others is something kindergarten children like to do because they love to feel competent and useful. What better way to practise tying shoes than helping out a friend? Washing tables, dishes or rubber dolls and putting away blocks can be very appealing tasks for five-year-olds. The wise teacher keeps them appealing by working alongside children, thanking them for their help

and giving them time to linger over the soap bubbles. He helps them see that planning and cleaning up afterwards are important parts of most jobs. Children like participating in all stages of a process. It helps them learn about time and sequence. Of course it helps them become responsible people too.

Pets

Caring for plants and animals is an important part of kindergarten. Young children need the experience of taking care of something small and dependent. They learn to be gentle. The teacher encourages them to talk about their pets, measure them, draw or paint pictures of them, find out their favourite foods and keep track of how much they eat and whose turn it is to feed them. For the alert teacher, everything that interests a child is a learning experience that can be extended.

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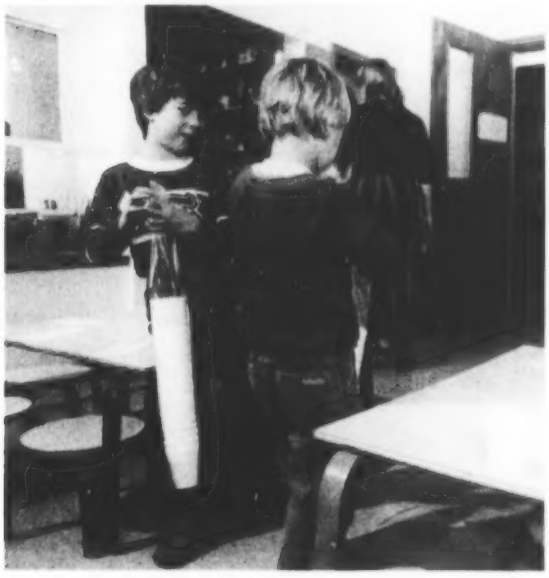
Cooking

Food preparation is another popular kindergarten activity. When they cook, children can follow recipes, mix, measure and observe the changes caused by freezing or heating. These are all practical math, language and science experiences. Without making it a dull lesson, the teacher does use the cooking activity – and many others – to extend the children's understanding.



Snack

Eating together is a social experience. In most kindergartens the children sit in small groups to encourage an easy flow of conversation. Setting the table, putting out one cup for each milk drinker and matching one napkin to each cup, children learn the real meaning of counting.

In some classrooms, parents take turns providing the ingredients for a group snack, so that children have frequent opportunities to prepare and enjoy food together.

Exercise

Vigorous exercise is important for growing five-year-olds. They need time each day for running, climbing and jumping, a chance to stretch and breathe deeply. This is healthy for the body and good for the mind as well. When they climb or aim at targets, or build with crates and boards, children solve problems, develop an awareness of space and learn to work together.

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Reading and Writing

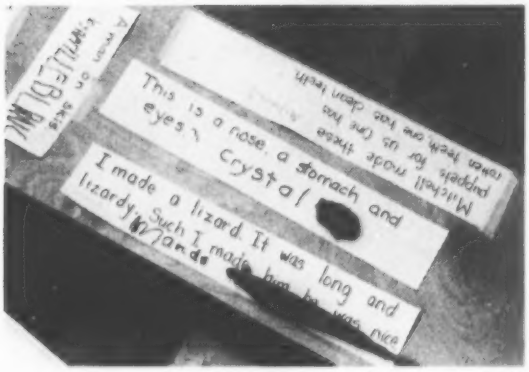
Many parents want to know whether reading and writing are taught in kindergarten. The answer is that, while there is no *formal* instruction in reading or any other academic subject in kinder- garten, some children do, in fact, learn to read and write. Many others will learn to recognize a few words meaningful to them.

How does this happen? Informally, much as it occurs in a book-loving home. Please note: informal teaching is not haphazard. Specialized training in Early Childhood Education enables kindergarten teachers to recognize meaningful opportunities to introduce reading and writing – and science, math and social studies concepts, too.

These opportunities arise from the children's activities and interests, such as making a shopping list for a trip to the store, writing notes to their parents or to one another, dictating descriptions of their art work, writing labels for their block buildings, counting out and sharing materials and supplies, keeping track of classroom chores, etc.

In the dramatic play area, children use real newspapers, shopping coupons and telephone books in their house play. You may also see a child reading a bedtime story to a doll or another child. Paper, markers, pencils, tape and scissors are always kept where teacher and children can find them for making signs, menus, money, or whatever props the play suggests.

You will not see worksheets or workbooks in kindergarten but you will find plenty of written material: recipes, words to favourite songs or rhymes, children's notes and dictated stories – material that is interesting and meaningful to the children. Of course, they won't all be able to read everything, but they are certainly learning how written language functions for communication.



Kindergarten teachers are well aware that their first responsibility is to develop children's oral language abilities through conversation, discussion and song, and by creating an environment that provides interesting things to talk about. But teachers know, too, that many fives are interested in the written language which is so conspicuous a part of the out-of-school environment, and they capitalize upon that interest in the ways described above.

One does not have to be a reader to appreciate books. The kindergarten room should house a good selection of children's books: stories, poems and reference books on a wide range of subjects important to children and teacher, such as animals, flowers, trucks, food and carpentry. The teacher reads daily to the entire group and often shares a book with a small group or a single child. Some teachers recruit volunteer readers, older children or parents, to help satisfy the five-year-olds' appetite for their favourite books. They also encourage children to browse through books on their own. This year's browser is likely to be next year's reader.

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Mathematics

In the hands of a knowledgeable teacher, math is an integral part of the play-oriented curriculum. The teacher sets up interesting situations which give rise to interesting problems:

How many cups will it take to fill this bottle?

Which is heavier, the wet sand or the dry sand?

Looking for patterns on a nature walk, arranging building blocks on shelves by shape, sorting buttons, measuring the amaryllis plant each week: these are valuable mathematics experiences which the teacher plans. Just as important, teachers make full use of the opportunities that arise spontaneously in play and conversation.

You think he's got more raisins? How could you find out for sure?

Your building is tall. Is it as tall as you are?

I'm going to give her five more pushes and then it will be your turn. You count while I push.

Group Activities

The teacher sometimes brings the whole group together to take part in activities like dancing, singing and finger plays, to listen to stories or to discuss matters of general interest. Pleasant group times like these will help your child feel comfortable about talking and listening to others. Even children who feel very shy at first tend to lose their fears in a relaxed, supportive environment.

Work/Play Time

Much time in kindergarten is devoted to work/play time, otherwise known as "choice time," "activity time," "free play," or "work period." Whatever its name, most kindergarten teachers consider it the most important part of the day because during this time children are engaged individually or in small groups on projects of their own choosing.

They may build with blocks, play house, try out musical instruments, look at books, experiment with writing, paint pictures, make roads in the sand, weigh objects in the balance scales or engage in any one of the activities carefully selected and prepared by the teacher.

A range of possibilities is made available for all children, but each child makes the activity her own; each has a special way of working, favourite play things and art materials, and preferred companions.

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Parents Are Welcome

Work/play time is an ideal time to visit kindergarten. It is here that you can really see the program in action. You may become so interested that you will want to be a regular visitor to your child's kindergarten. As a visitor you might accompany the group on trips, read stories or share a special interest or hobby. Your involvement will enrich the kindergarten program, keep you informed and delight your child. You don't have to volunteer on a regular basis; an occasional visit from a busy parent is meaningful too.

All Children Are Welcome

Like grade one, public kindergarten is for all children of eligible age. Children with special needs attend kindergarten in integrated settings, to their own and other children's benefit. The flexible, play-based curriculum of a good kindergarten is especially designed to accommodate children with a wide range of interests and abilities. Different children will require different kinds of supports and adaptations. All children are welcome.

Children Learn

The teacher helps children to become involved in projects that interest them deeply and, by nurturing their involvement, fuels their love of learning. Most children are intensely curious about the world. Isn't your child? The gifted teacher – and all kindergarten teachers should be gifted – is the one who helps develop children's eagerness to look and touch into a hunger to understand. Children motivated from within have a powerful capacity to concentrate, persevere, and succeed.

We hope that we have spoken to some of your questions and concerns about kindergarten. It may be clear now that both your neighbour and Grandfather are right, because the kind of kindergarten that allows children to be children, that encourages their curiosity and their active, hands-on learning style, is the one that best prepares them for the grades ahead.

Of course you and your child may have specific questions about kindergarten that are not answered here. Please share these questions with your child's kindergarten teacher and school principal. They are eager to get to know you.

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